Texting While Driving -- Another Kind of Impairment

Texting While Driving Is Hazardous

- Driving skill is measurably impaired by text-messaging.
- Writing text messages creates a significantly greater impairment than reading text messages, but both are harmful

Driver Causes Fatal Wreck While Texting On Cellphone
Text Messaging Teen Blamed In Fatal Wreck
Peoria police said they believe a fatal accident was caused by a teenager who was text messaging on her cell phone and let her car drift into oncoming traffic, reported KPHO in Phoenix.
Full Story: NBC 10 Philadelphia
Text Messaging to Blame in Teen's Car Wreck?
BY TIM STEVENS, POSTED JUL 16TH 2007 AT 4:07PM
Texting banned on California trains after deadly crash
Text Messaging An Increasing Cause of Auto Accidents
AIT 8 abc
Jonesboro, AR
Home News Weather Sports Business Community
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J'Boro Driver Charged in Fatal Wreck, Police Say He Was Texting
Posted Dec 4, 2008 09:49 AM EST
STATE NEWS
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Parents of injured toddler believe text-messaging caused wreck
NAVAL SAFETY CENTER
EST. 1951

Texting Drivers in the News

- A 17-year-old texting driver in New York state swerved into oncoming traffic and hit a truck head-on, killing herself and her four passengers.
- A texting California train engineer was involved in the collision near Los Angeles that killed 25 passengers and injured 130 others.
- A 27-year-old Arkansas texting driver crashed his vehicle into another car, killing its driver (the Arkansas man was charged with negligent homicide, and had been also drinking a beer at the time).

Texting Drivers in the News, cont.

- An 18-year-old texting driver in Texas slammed full-speed into a stopped vehicle, sending a 3-year-old passenger in that vehicle to the ICU at a local hospital with a broken skull.
- A 16-year-old texting driver in California lost control and dies in the ensuing crash (she was also speeding and had been drinking).

What Studies Show About Texting

- Driver inattention is involved in about 80 percent of crashes (*NHTSA, 2006*)
- 46 percent of teenagers text while driving (*AAA*)
- 91% of Americans think that it's unsafe to text message while driving and that it's just as bad as driving after a couple of drinks (*Harris Poll, August 2007*)

What Studies Show About Cell Phones

- Drivers talking on their cell phones were 18 percent slower braking than other motorists (*University of Utah, 2005*)
- Talking on a cell phone while driving caused impairment on par with driving with a blood-alcohol level of 0.08 percent (*University of Utah*)

What a Recent Study Assessed

- Impact of text messaging on driver performance
- Attitudes and beliefs that surrounded the activity in the 17-25 age category
- Study done by the Transport Research Laboratory in September 2008.

How the Study Worked

- Studied reaction times, car-following ability, lane control, and driver speed
- Used a driving simulator
- 8 male, 9 female participants between the ages of 17-24.
- All described themselves as regular users of text messaging and used phones with standard key pads.

The Test Drives

- Participants took a 10-minute familiarization drive. Had to follow a lead vehicle at a safe distance.
- On the next test drive, they had to read a text message, and compose and send a message.
- The third drive was without distractions.

What Texting Drivers Did Wrong

While driving and texting, drivers:

- failed to detect hazards,
- responded to hazards more slowly, and
- were exposed to risk for longer periods.

Negative Affects

- Less able to keep a constant distance behind lead vehicle
- Large increases in variability of lane position
- Many more lane departures
- In actual traffic, these driving errors dramatically increase the likelihood of collision.

Dangerously Slowed Reaction Times

- Reaction times are slower when reading or writing a message.
- Reaction time for drivers trying to compose a text message increased from 1.2 to 1.6 seconds.
- At highway speeds, drivers can travel more than a mile while texting.

Slowed Reaction Times, cont.

- Slower reaction times result in an increased stopping distance of three car lengths.
- Could easily make the difference between causing and avoiding an accident or between a fatal and non-fatal collision.

What Causes This Impairment?

- Increased mental workload required to write a text message
- Less physical control caused by holding the phone
- Visual impairment caused by continually looking back and forth from the phone display and the road ahead

Worse than Drinking, Smoking Pot

- Reaction-time impairment caused by texting while driving was apparently greater than that caused by:
  - drinking alcohol to the legal limit for driving
  - smoking pot
  - talking on a hands-free phone.
- Compared to three earlier TRL studies

Who Texts and Drives?

- In 2008, 2,002 members of the social networking website Facebook were asked to self-report whether they text while driving.
- 45% admitted doing so.

Is Gender a Factor?

- Impairment caused by texting was far more significant for female rather than male drivers.
- However, male drivers are more likely to text and drive.
- As a result, overall impairment across the sexes may be more equal.

Solutions

- Don’t get into the habit of texting and driving.
- If you already do it, stop. Pull over if you have urgent business or an emergency.
- Don’t ride with drivers who are texting. Tell them to stop.
- Concentrate on traffic and other drivers while you are behind the wheel.